MUSIC

Hitting it off

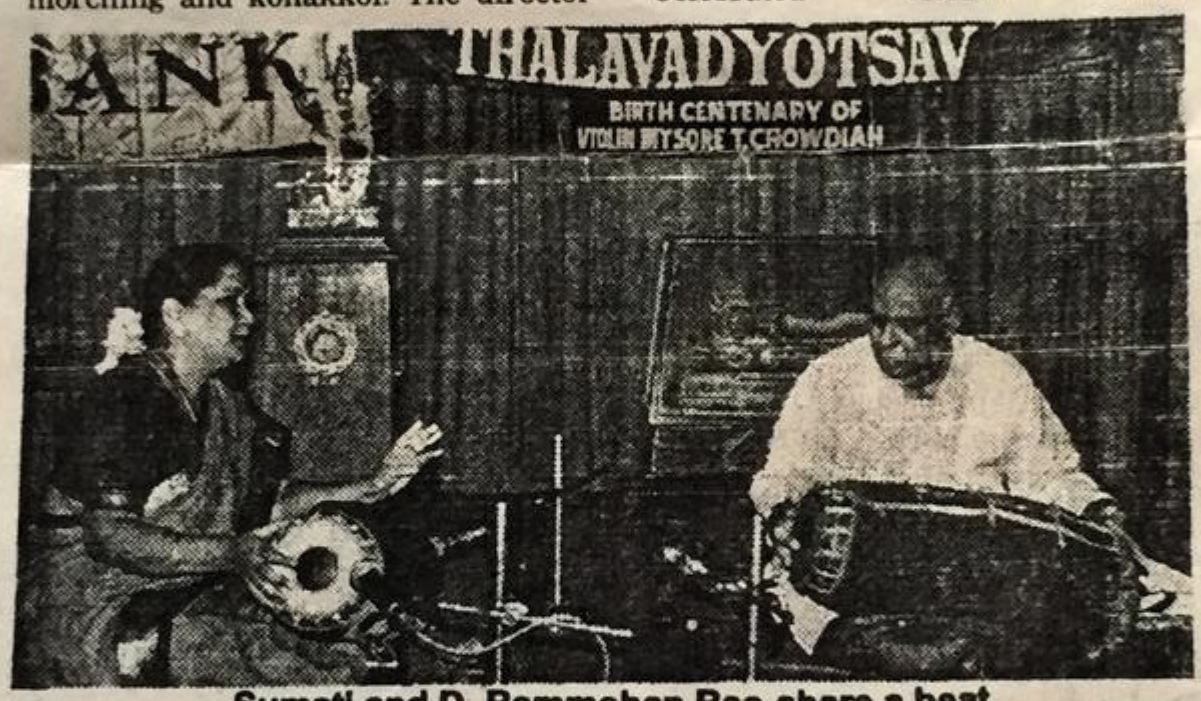
A recent trend in Karnatic music is the formation of exclusive ensembles of Tala Vadyas. But most of them seem to suffer from a 'Pakka Vadyam' complex instead of coming out of this groove to give an independent identity to tala and laya and open new prospects in this area. True, such efforts have been taken before. We may recall in this context the thematic compositions based exclusively on tala vadyas by Jnanprakash Ghosh or compositions like the 'Fantasy of Indian Drums' by Vijay Raghava Rao etc. But by and large these new ensembles perform an enlarged version of taniavartanam.

The performance of the 'Vadya Laya Vrnda' of Bombay as part of the 13th Tala Vadyotsava of the Bangalore Percussive Art Centre is one such instance. It is an eight-piece ensemble consisting of three mridangams, and one each of thavil, khanjari, ghatam, morching and konakkol. The director of this vrnda is Ambalapuzha T.S. Nandakumar. In its 75-minute performance the tala vadyas seemed to function as a support to the violin solo of Vanamala Dikshit. She started with the celebrated Bhairavi varnam 'Viriboni', carried it in two speeds, followed up with a couple of more kritis and rounded it off with a pallavi. The percussion faithfully followed in singles or alternating and joining together in final stages. In the percussion round up some variety was introduced like movements carried in relays and played in syncopated forms etc. But the overall impression created was of just a quantitative taniavartanam. Among the performers the three mridangists — Chidambaram, Rajagopal and especially young Vijay Natesan were impressive. This is true of young Vidya Balasubramaniam, who handled the konakkol competently, maintaining precision even in the artistic pauses.

'Laya Vinyasam' was one of the highlights of the Utsav. It was presented by this year's recipient of the Palghat Mani Iyer memorial award, Dandamudi Ramamohan Rao. In fact it was a duet between two mridangams, the other participant being Sumati, Rammohan Rao's better half. Rao chose the aditala in chaturasra beat for this vinyasam and gradually developed a structure of pulsating figures. The phrasing was crisp, neat and their manipulation, though it looked simple, had many tight spots. The units grouped and regrouped into attractive formations like amoebic cells, all pulsating with life. Sometimes when one of them maintained the beat by a stroke on the instrument, the other improvised and brought out bouncy rhythmic figures. At one stage while Rao maintained such a trisra beat, Sumathi came out with wide and astonishing variety in units, packed into halt, three-fourths and full cycles of tala. The Layavinyasam was an artistic treat.

Celebrated violinist M.S. Gopalakrishnan brought the curtain down on the Utsav. Supported on the violin by his daughter Narmada, MSG presented this time a different bill of fare. It was a neat package consisting of Kalyani Varnam 'Vanajakshi' in adi tala (almost forgotten by musicians), Malahari, Umabharanam, Hamsanandi, Begada and rounded off with Sindhu Bhairavi. Needless to add that he held the audience throughout by the silky smooth instrumental tone, the pellucid melody, the crispness of each movement the variety in the instrumental ornamentation and above all the perfection in the presentation of raga or kriti. It was an aesthetically satisfying performance. Mrudangist T.A.S. Mani performed with an understanding which also impressed by its brevity, especially in the taniavartanam. Ghatam player M.A. Krishnamurthy neatly followed suit.

BVK



Sumati and D. Rammohan Rao share a beat.